
March 5, 2020

The Honorable Kumar Barve
Chairman, House Environment and Transportation Committee
251 House Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

**Re: Letter of Information– House Bill 1236 – Transit – Maryland Area Regional
Commuter Train – Expansion of Service**

Dear Chairman Barve and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on House Bill 1236 offers the following information for the Committee’s consideration.

House Bill 1236 requires that the Maryland Department of Transportation Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA) engage in good faith negotiations with the host railroads, state agencies, and local governments to reach a written agreement on a pilot program to establish Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) train service between Union Station in the District of Columbia (DC) and Alexandria Station in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Additionally, House Bill 1236 requires the submission of an annual report regarding this effort.

In December 2019, the Commonwealth of Virginia announced an agreement with CSX Transportation to acquire existing rail and adjacent right-of-way (ROW) with the intention of improving commuter rail service in the DC/Northern Virginia Region. It is unclear at this time when ownership of the ROW will be transferred, who will control the train schedule of the corridor, who will act as the host railroad for Positive Train Control (PTC) on the corridor, and how the construction schedule will impact capacity. Additionally, issues such as fare payment, service operation agreements, and oversight of the pilot service, still need to be resolved.

MDOT MTA is currently engaged with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) and other stakeholders (including Virginia Railway Express (VRE), Virginia Department of Rail & Public Transportation, and the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission) on a Market Assessment for a similar service described in House Bill 1236. Results and analysis are expected to be complete before the end of the year, after which a final report will be released. Data contained in this report will help MARC Train’s ongoing internal analysis regarding potential future run-through service and its implications on the current system. The service prescribed in House Bill 1236 could ultimately be too restrictive based on the results of the study.

Any expansion of service in the area must be coordinated with the planned construction program undertaken by the Commonwealth of Virginia, which includes reconstruction of two VRE stations, the addition of mainline track between segments in Washington, D.C. and Northern

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Virginia, and the completion of the new Long Bridge span. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation has not provided a schedule for this construction program, which covers the 8-mile corridor between Washington, D.C. and Alexandria, VA. This program has an aggressive schedule that will likely require track outages which will reduce capacity on existing infrastructure and adversely affect service reliability. The addition of new MARC service into the construction zone mandated in House Bill 1236 will require the Virginia program to lengthen the construction schedule or may portray the new MARC service as unreliable.

In addition to the work that is being undertaken by Virginia, Amtrak is expected to begin major repairs to the Union Station Sub-basement, which directly affects all train service south of Union Station in Washington, D.C. During construction of this project, Amtrak anticipates multiple tracks will be concurrently out of service. Completion of the repairs is not expected until 2025 and may preclude run-through service from beginning, at least until repairs are completed.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests that the committee consider this information when deliberating House Bill 1236.

Respectfully submitted,

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